DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 283 CG 016 877

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TITLE Revisioning Invitational Education.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, Montreal, Canada, April 11-14, 1983).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Environment; Educational Objectives; *Educational Theories; Essays; Foreign Countries; *Humanistic Education; Self Concept; *Student Development; Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS Canada; *Invitational Education

ABSTRACT

This paper examines some of the most recent conceptual developments in invitational education. Using some of the new ideas presented in Inviting School Success, Second Edition (Purkey and Novak, in press), a more expansive definition and application of invitational education is offered. New concepts such as theory of practice, stance, and "withness" are explored. The foundations of invitational education are discussed, and an approach to education and training based on the four basic principles of invitational education is described. The metaphor of the school as an inviting family is discussed through five basic characteristics: (1) respect for human uniqueness; (2) cooperative spirit; (3) sense of belonging; (4) pleasing habitat; and (5) positive expectation. Further exploration of key aesthetic, ethical, political, and religious issues are called for to aid in the refinement of invitational theory. (Author/MCF)

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Revisioning Invitational Education

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Abstract

Revisioning Invitational Education

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This paper provides an examination of some of the most recent conceptual developments of invitational education. Using some of the new ideas presented in the forthcoming Second Edition of Inviting School Success, it offers a more expansive definition and application of invitational education. New concepts such as theory of practice, stance and "witness" are explored.

More specifically, the claim is made that as invitational education attempts to move from being an interesting point to consider about teaching and learning to a larger perspective for examining and developing professional and personal actions, it touches on some fundamental philosophical issues. Further, exploration and clarification of key aesthetic, ethical, political, and religious issues will aid in the refinement of invitational theory.

REVISIONING INVITATIONAL EDUCATION

> "It is pictures rather than propositions,
> metaphors rather than statements, which determine
> most of our philosophical convictions."
>
> Richard Rorty,
> Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,
> Pg. 12

To re-vision means to step back and picture something in a new light. This new light is intended to aid insight in areas previously undetected. With this in mind, the First Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey, 1978) looked at teaching and learning from the point of view of self-concept theory. This book strongly emphasized that "rather than viewing students as physical objects to be moved about like puppets on strings, the teacher's primary role is to see students in essentially positive ways and to invite them to behave accordingly" (Purkey, 1978, p. vi). The new metaphor used in this approach was to see teaching as a "doing with" rather than a "doing to" process.

This paper will look at the ways this re-visioning has been extended and refined in the Second Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, In Press). More specifically, a new definition of invitational education and its basic concepts and foundations will be presented and analyzed, along with areas that need further research.

What is Invitational Education?

Invitational education is intended to be a theory of practice, a systematic way of thinking about how people in the helping profession can and should behave so as to provide a beneficial presence for others and themselves. As such it seeks to develop "a body of prescriptions to guide

practice" (Moore, 1974, p. 10). These prescriptions for professional practice should be judged on their coherence, empirical basis, moral defensibility, clarity and usefulness in suggesting intelligent and imaginative approaches to professional functioning. The basic content for this theory of practice is to be found in the definition of invitational education.

The new definition of invitational education presented in the Second Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, In Press) is as follows:

> Invitational education is a perceptually based, self-concept approach to the educative process and professional functioning which is centered on four basic principles: (1) that people are able, valuable, and responsible and should be treated accordingly, (2) that education should be a collaborative, cooperative activity between and among people, (3) that people possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development, and (4) that this potential can be realized by places, policies and programs which are specifically designed to invite optimal development, and by people who are intentionally inviting to themselves and others, both personally and professionally.
>
> The practice of invitational education is based on an understanding of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional messages intended, extended, received, and acted upon. This understanding is used to develop actions, places, policies, and programs which are anchored in attitudes of respect, care, and civility, and which are aimed at promoting positive relationships and encouraging human potential.

Although this definition is not the final word on invitational education it does provide a good starting point for examining key aspects of this theory of professional practice.

Foundations of Invitational Education

The inviting approach to professional functioning has its roots in the perceptual tradition and self concept theory. Within this tradition it builds on James' (1980) distinction of the self as subject and object (1890), Cooley's (1902) notion of the looking glass self, Mead's (1934) emphasis on social interaction and the development of the self, Lecky's (1945) concept of the self striving for consistency in perceptions, Kelly's (1955) development of the construing person and Rogers' (1947, 1959, 1961, 1967, 1974, 1980) career long commitment to people as perceptive, purposeful and capable of taking responsibility for their present lives and future aspirations. In addition it pays special attention to the Snygg-Combs theory of perception (1949) which stresses that people behave according to how they see themselves and the situation they are in.

Acknowledging that behaviour is based on perceptions which are learned, the Second Edition of Inviting School Success points out that perceptions can be reflected upon and reconstructed to deal with changing, more complex situations. Thus, people can not only react to their immediate lived world, they can come to some understanding regarding the genesis and consequences of maintaining their present perspective.

Perceptions can be reflective and reflexive. People can stop and think about what they are thinking about and where it might be taking them. This reflective turn in invitational theory provides important cognitive and moral dimensions for the inviting process. Professionals who view people as generally valuable, able and responsible have an obligation

to convey these perceptions through meaningful and responsible behaviours. Thus the inviting theory of practice is an attempt to connect perception and actions through a concern for how people perceive themselves and their possibilities.

An Approach to Education and Professional Functioning

To invite education is perhaps best seen in comparison with its contrast, "to dictate training". The former promotes the activity of meaningly sorting out the world through a special "doing with" relationship between the people involved. It pays special attention, in an open-ended way, to a person's view of himself or herself, how people presently perceive a situation, and what different perceptions might be entertained and more clearly differentiated. Thus from this perspective, the educative process involves a concerned, negotiable relationship, is open-ended, and aims to extend personal systems of meaning.

In contrast to this, intending to "dictate training" involves a "doing to" relationship in which a designated superior takes direct action aimed at changing behaviour of others in specific ways. This approach stresses efficiency and exactitude. Humane techniques will be employed if they can bring about the desired results.

Although both sides of this continum are open to caricature, a qualitative difference regarding the nature of human relationships can be seen in each. Inviting education intends a distinctly human relationship while dictating training intends a mechanically efficient relationship. The techniques of each approach should be seen in the light of their basic intention. Thus it may be difficult to tell whether a specific action is inviting education unless it is seen in its larger intentional context.

By extending the use of the inviting approach to all professional functioning, emphasis is placed on the notion that in a democratic society all professional activities are rooted in human interaction and human concerns. In Jurgen Habermas' terms, the process of inviting is communicative rather than purposive-rational action (1970). It involves relating to people and not things. Therefore, there are special ways of thinking and responsibilities for action when our activities involve interacting with humans rather than movable objects. Thus it is not only possible to picture an inviting educator, but with some imagination, an inviting parent, an inviting dentist, and an inviting civil servant. Conceptual work, relating the role requirements of specific professions with the inviting approach, still needs to be done. It would seem to offer most interesting possibilities. Let us now move to the four basic principles of invitational education.

Principle #1

> ...people are valuable, able and responsible and should be treated accordingly.

Viewing people as valuable can be both a normative and empirical statement. In its normative sense it stresses that human uniqueness is good and ought to be respected. Empirically it implies that people who are a part of the social system are needed participants in the optimal functioning of that system. A difficulty may arise when these two perceptions of "valuable" come in conflict--when uniqueness gets in the way of optimal functioning.

Invitational education, as I perceive it, attempts to reconcile conflicts between the individual and the social system by stressing that social systems exist for the realization of human value and thus are subject to change when situations warrant revision. Likewise, people may

see the need to curtail certain activities if it can be shown that the realization of human values is restricted by their behaviour. The point is that both social structures and individual behaviour are subject to negotiation and revision in light of the inviting principles. Obviously this is not always easy and clear cut. The analysis of specific situations and methods of change available and desirable would make most interesting research.

Seeing people as able is an acknowledgement that each person has relatively untapped capabilities for thinking, choosing, and learning. Rather than emphasizing what people cannot do, invitational education attempts to build on what they can and might be able to do. Ultimately this is a commitment to the idea that each person is more complex than our present knowledge admits. This assumes that by accepting this complexity and attempting to go with the flow of the dynamics of human functioning, better learning possibilities will develop. Certainly the work of cognitive psychology can be helpful here.

Perceiving and treating people as responsible is based on the necessity of choice in human interaction. According to perceptual psychology, people choose to learn and cooperate. Recognizing the difficulty, undesirability and perhaps impossibility of making people behave in narrowly prescribed ways, the inviting approach builds on the assumption that people will choose to cooperate in those activities that they perceive to have significance in their personal lives.

Recognizing the other's right to accept, reject or hold in abeyance the messages sent involves a respect for the "net", the hypothetical boundary between sender and receiver. Use of the "net" metaphor implies that people can only go so far in their attempts to influence others.

The compatibility of this concept with the strong pressure on professionals to immediately control the behaviour of others needs further exploration.

Principle #2

> ...education should be a collaborative, cooperative activity between and among people.

The "doing with" nature of invitational education has already been stressed. In order to carry this idea further the Second Edition of Inviting School Success uses the term "withness" to describe the cooperative and beneficial coming together that is sought in the inviting process. Conceptually it is difficult to describe in detail the components of "withness" but experientially we seem to know when we have reached it with others--things seemed to have clicked and meaningful things happen. Further exploration of this concept may be along the lines of Stephen C. Pepper's description of the contextualistic approach to aesthetics which is based on "voluntary vivid intuitions of quality" (1945, p. 56). "Witness" is a quality perceived in invitations.

In seeking to invite others, it is this beneficial coming together that is sought. Due to the uniqueness of every human situation a mechanical formula for its attainment cannot be given. However a necessary precondition seems to be a sensitivity to others, ourselves, the specific situations we find ourselves in, and a desire to reach together.

Principle #3

> ...people possess relatively untapped potential in all areas of human development.

This principle is simultaneously an act of faith and hope, with a little charity thrown in for ethical practice. In the inviting approach this amounts to having a desire and belief that humans can be more than

they presently are intellectually, emotionally, physically and socially. In addition, this implies that the basis for development is present within each person and situation.

The principle does not intend to negate each person's present state for some ideal goal, but maintains that part of what we are now is that we can become more. Perhaps this potential can be described in Whitehead's religious terms as that "something which is real, and yet waiting to be realized" (1925, p. 275). By having something to reach for we can build on what is positive in the present.

Belief in human realization of potential implies that growth is normal and desirable and that the continual non-realization of this potential is a distortion of a basic human impulse. Obviously a clarification of what constitutes intellectual, emotional, physical and social growth is necessary. In addition, an analysis of the conditions that foster or inhibit this potential is certainly needed. Needless to say, these are not minor philosophical or political issues.

Principle #4

> ...this potential can be realized by places, policies and programs which are specifically designed to invite optimal development, and by people who are intentionally inviting to themselves and others, both personally and professionally.

Although this principle is difficult to state in one breath it constitutes an important extension of the inviting approach. The First Edition of Inviting School Success stressed that "teaching is inviting". The Second Edition acknowledges this but adds that "everyone and everything in and around schools serve as signal systems which invite or disinvite success in school" (Purkey and Novak, In press, Preface). Thus, according

to this revised position, the messages people receive about who they are and what they might become go beyond the interpersonal.

Within schools, messages which invite or disinvite human potential come also from the physical environment, curricula and policies. To better construe inviting places, policies,and programs the metaphor of the school as an "inviting family" rather than as an "efficient factory" is offered.

In the inviting family five basic characteristics are stressed: 1) respect for human uniqueness, 2) cooperative spirit, 3) sense of belonging, 4) pleasing habitat, and 5) positive expectations. The inviting approach stresses that these characteristics can and should be intentionally and systematically applied to schools. Further conceptual and empirical work regarding what constitutes inviting content, organizational form,and processes of decision-making in curricula and policy issues is strongly needed to make this a realizable alternative.

In order to help create and maintain inviting schools, individuals who can sustain the desire and energy to function at an intentionally inviting level are needed. This requires the application and orchestration of the inviting approach to various areas of functioning. Quite simply, the claim is made that in order to be continually inviting to others professionally, individuals need to use the inviting approach with themselves personally and professionally and with others personally. It is the orchestration of these areas that provide people with the inner energy, support group, knowledge and skills to become "long distance inviters". Thus the inviting approach to professional functioning necessarily connects with other areas of living.

The Practice of Invitational Education

The basic unit of analysis and prescription in invitational theory is the message. Messages have many dimensions, but they can be placed on a continuum according to their perceived tone (positive or negative), intentionality (purposeful or accidental), dependability (persistence over time), integrity (relationship to a person's core personality), creativity (appropriate and novel) and subtlety (extent to which they call attention to themselves). Use of these dimensions could provide the basis for an analysis for assessing messages and their effects.

Questions regarding the types of messages people do or do not consider sending and the type of messages they choose to send but somehow never really do send, need further exploration. In addition, research relating the message intended and the message actually received, interpreted and acted upon would be most useful in better informing those involved in the inviting process.

The knowledge gained through an understanding of message systems is useful to those who seek to be intentionally inviting. Using this knowledge, they are better able to develop an inviting stance, a prevailing disposition to be a beneficial presence in the lives of people. This inviting stance, which is an artful blending of perceptions and behaviour, involves a commitment to be purposefully inviting, a respect for the other's right to accept, reject or hold in abeyance our messages, a desire to reach with people, and a responsibility to follow up on messages sent. It is with and through the use and development of this stance that educators are able to go to deeper levels of inviting--beyond winks and nods.

Final Statement

Invitational theory is attempting to develop a more complete picture of the possibilities of the inviting process. As it moves from the limited view that "teaching is inviting" to a larger perspective for examining and developing professional and personal actions, it touches on some fundamental aesthetic, ethical, political and religious issues. Although a revised picture may be worth a thousand propositions, deeper exploration of the propositions generated by that picture will help bring it into clearer focus.

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